

VZCZCXRO7798

RR RUEHAG RUEHAST RUEHDA RUEHDF RUEHFL RUEHIK RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHLN
RUEHLZ RUEHPOD RUEHROV RUEHSR RUEHVK RUEHYG
DE RUEHTI #1068 3551306
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 211306Z DEC 07
FM AMEMBASSY TIRANA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 6484
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS TIRANA 001068

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR/SCE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [SOCI](#) [PGOV](#) [AL](#)

SUBJECT: ALBANIA: COMBATTING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

¶1. (U) Ambassador Withers hosted a roundtable discussion at the University of Tirana Law Center on December 11 to mark the end of sixteen days of activism in honor of the International Day Against Gender-Based Violence. Participants included students, civil society leaders and government officials who debated with the audience how far Albania has come toward implementing recent legal advances against domestic violence and changing outdated societal attitudes toward gender equality. Passionate questions from student activists were met with equally vehement responses that highlighted both progress and the general societal will to see it furthered.

¶2. (U) In an historic grassroots effort, Albanian civil society groups initiated a draft law on "Measures for Prevention of Violence within the Family" and submitted it to Parliament with 20,000 citizens' signatures of support. This was the first time legislation was generated from the ground up in Albania. The law took effect in June 2007. It provides administrative and legal aid for victims, including physical shelter and psychological support for abused women and measures such as the right to a restraining order against the perpetrator of violence.

¶3. (U) Many actors that work directly on implementation of the anti-domestic violence law attended the roundtable, spiritedly promoting recent achievements against charges that these nascent efforts did not amount to significant change. Student volunteers in social work and pro bono legal aid, as well as NGO representatives, argued instead that over time the law's positive effects would multiply, affecting underlying attitudes as well as legalities, but that such change takes time.

¶4. (U) Participants agreed that key to the law's ultimate success, as well as to increasing gender equality, will be increased awareness of women's legal rights, not only in the capital city but particularly in outlying villages where traditional views are reinforced by a lack of economic opportunity for women. The approximately one hundred people gathered for the roundtable event are among those citizens who will continue to be a rallying force for gender equality in Albania.

¶5. (SBU) COMMENT: The roundtable elicited a higher-than-expected turnout and strong response from the largely student audience. Notably, almost half were men. These students, including a male law student participating on the panel, spoke vehemently regarding the need for raised awareness and gender equality in Albania. We hope the roundtable provoked further thought and piqued the interest of the "next generation" on this issue. It also highlighted a singular Albanian accomplishment and success with its path-breaking law against family violence, which may inspire further grassroots efforts by those who saw evidence of the venture's success.
WITHERS